Fathers' use of paid parental leave

Katherine Marshall

Although the objectives of international paid leave programs are not identical, one universal goal is to help families balance or reconcile work and family responsibilities—which in turn is intended to increase the well-being of children. To this end, emphasis has been put on extending leave time for parents and encouraging the father's involvement. Research has shown that a father's involvement has a positive effect on co-parenting and partner relationships, personal development, and the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development of children (Allen and Daly 2007). Even short-term paid leave for fathers has been linked to positive outcomes, which can set the stage for longer-term involvement (Moss and O'Brien 2006).

As is the case in many other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, Canada's paid parental leave policies have changed considerably in recent years. Two key changes to the federal Parental Benefits Program (PBP) in 2001 were the increase in the number of shareable paid benefit weeks per family from 10 to 35 and the elimination of a second two-week unpaid waiting period. In 2006, Quebec began administering its own separate Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) offering, for example, higher benefit rates, no unpaid waiting period and a five-week non-transferable paternity leave.

This article uses the 2006 Employment Insurance Coverage Survey (EICS) to examine fathers' use of paid parental leave in Quebec and the other provinces. Recent revisions to the questionnaire enable the assessment of how parental leave is shared by spouses, as well as the number of weeks of paid leave the father uses and reasons for not claiming parental leave benefits (see *Data source and definitions*).

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Data source and definitions

The Employment Insurance Coverage Survey (EICS) has been an annual supplement to the Labour Force Survey since 1997. Its main purpose is to study the coverage of the Employment Insurance program. To coincide with the expansion of the parental leave program on December 31, 2000, several new questions were added to collect information from new mothers on access to and use of parental leave. More parental leave content was added in 2004 and 2005. For example, a question regarding the number of weeks the spouse (father) intends to take was introduced only in 2005. In 2006, some questions were modified because of the change in jurisdiction of parental benefits in Quebec.

All questions regarding a father's use of parental leave benefits are answered by the mother. In some cases, the father may not yet have taken leave but planned to do so. At the time of the survey it is not possible to distinguish between fathers who had already taken leave or were currently on leave, or whose leave was upcoming. For ease of description, all cases are labelled as fathers who claimed and received benefits.

The **target population** for this study was all mothers living with a spouse and children less than 13 months of age in 2006. The sample of roughly 1,130 mothers represented 325,000 couples.

Parental benefits are available to previously employed qualifying parents (see *Details of the PBP and the QPIP*). For the purpose of this study, parental and paternity leave benefits are used interchangeably when referring to Quebec. The EICS did not differentiate between the types of QPIP paid benefits fathers claimed.

An **eligible father** is someone who claimed parental leave benefits or someone who did not claim for any reason other than ineligibility. Mothers were asked to report why their spouse did not claim benefits, including the category 'not eligible.'

Monthly income before birth was determined from a direct question asking mothers to report their total household income from all sources in the month before the birth or adoption.

Earnings ratio is the mother's average hourly earnings multiplied by her average hours worked divided by the father's earnings and hours worked. If the ratio was 1 or greater, the mother was deemed to earn the same as or more than the father. If either spouse was self-employed, the ratio could not be calculated.

Many European programs actively encourage paternal participation

Fathers' participation in parental leave programs and the time taken have become a prominent area of public policy debate and development in many OECD countries (Moss and O'Brien 2006). Some countries have used legislation as a method to help raise the parental leave take-up rate among fathers. This has been done mainly by creating individual, non-transferable periods of leave for each parent as well as additional time that can be used by either parent (see *International comparisons*). Countries with this form of program include Belgium, Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway and Sweden. In other countries, the entire parental leave period can be used by either or both parents, but additional or bonus weeks of paid leave are offered if the father claims some of the leave (e.g. Austria, Finland, Germany and Italy).

Not surprisingly, countries with the highest paternal participation rates include those with non-transferable leave programs that also offer high-wage replacement rates, mainly Nordic countries—Sweden (90% participation rate), Norway (89%) and Iceland (84%). Parental leave take-up rates are lower for fathers and mothers in countries where the earnings replacement rate is low, regardless of the type of leave program—Belgium has a paternal participation rate of under 7%, Austria, 2% and France, 1%. In other words, since most countries do not replace all earnings for parents on leave, and since men, on average, earn more than women, families may be dissuaded from having the father claim parental leave because of the greater financial burden (Moss and O'Brien 2006). However, at the same time, the economic stability of the family is recognized as another key factor in the well-being of children.

Canadian programs have also evolved

Since 1971, mothers with enough insurable weeks of employment have been able to claim up to 15 weeks of paid maternity leave—considered special benefits under the current Employment Insurance Program (EI). In 1990, the Parental Benefits Program (PBP) introduced 10 weeks of paid leave available for sharing by qualifying parents for the care of their newborn. Further amendments to the EI Act (December 31, 2000) effective in 2001 extended PBP benefits to 35 weeks, eliminated the second two-week waiting period if both parents wanted to use some of the leave, reduced the required number of annual employment hours from 700 to 600 and allowed earnings up to 25% of benefits per week without reduction.[1] The PBP is deemed a core component of the National Children's Agenda and, as in other countries, is designed to "promote child development" and help parents "balance the demands of work and very young children" (HRSDC, 2005). An evaluation of these changes found positive outcomes related to the aforementioned objectives, including the length of leave taken, the length of breastfeeding, and the quality of parent and child interactions (HRSDC 2005).

Another social objective[2] of the enhanced PBP is to "promote gender equality" by advancing the uptake rate of fathers and the sharing of benefits between spouses (HRSDC 2005). It is generally expected that an increase in fathers' use of paid parental leave will help break down gender stereotypes, in turn helping to achieve gender equity. For example, assumptions that only mothers use parental leave "can fuel employment discrimination against the recruitment and promotion of women" while at the same time making it difficult for fathers to take leave because it "conflicts with workplace cultures and expectations about the

International comparisons

Consistent data on international practices regarding paid paternity and parental leave are difficult to find. Collection methods, program rules and regulations, and presentation of the results vary considerably. However, despite the challenges, interest in the subject is mounting and concerted efforts have recently been made to make international comparisons. For example, the International Network on Leave Policy and Research, established in 2004, produces an annual report on maternity, paternity and parental leave policies in over 20 countries. Recent international research from several sources is presented below. Thirteen of the 20 OECD countries under consideration offer paid paternity or parental leave of at least two weeks to fathers. Seven countries do not have such leave, including Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. Belgium, Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway and Sweden offer non-transferable leave to both mothers and fathers. Denmark used to have non-transferable parental leave for fathers until 2002, when legislation changed the two-week period back to 'family' benefits. In Canada, Quebec offers an exceptionally long non-transferable paternity leave of 5 weeks.

International comparisons (concluded)

Selected OECD countries with more than two weeks of statutory paid paternity or parental leave available to fathers

		Paid parental leave			
	Paid paternity	Allocation[1]	Earnings replacement	Take-up[2]	Special incentives for fathers
Austria 2006	None	18 months, family	Flat rate (low benefits)	2%	6 extra months
Belgium 2006	10 days	24 weeks: 12, mother; 12, father	Flat rate (low benefits)	<7%	
Canada 2006					
Quebec	5 weeks	32 weeks, family	55-75%	48%	
Rest of Canada	None	35 weeks, family	55%	10%	
Denmark 2006	2 weeks	32 weeks, family	Unemployment benefit rate	62%	
Finland 2005	3 weeks	26 weeks, family	43-82%	10%	2 extra weeks
France 2006	11 days	36 months, family	Flat rate (half minimum wage)	1%	
Germany 2007	None	12 months, family	67%	9%	2 extra months
Iceland 2005	None	9 months: 3, mother; 3, father; 3, family	80%	84%	
Italy 2006	None	10 months, family	30%	7%	1 extra month
Luxembourg 2006	2 days	12 months: 6, mother; 6, father	Flat rate (minimum wage)	17%	
Norway 2006	None	54 weeks: 9, mother; 6, father; 39, family	80-100%	89%	
Portugal 2006	5 days	15 days, father	100%	30%	
Sweden 2006	2 weeks	68 weeks: 8, mother; 8, father; 52, family	80%	90%	

1. Family leave can be shared between parents; leave by sex is non-transferable (if a parent does not use the leave, it is forfeited).
2. Although this is meant to refer to fathers' participation rate in parental leave, as in the case of Quebec, it is not always clear if a distinction has been made between paternity and parental leave.

Sources: Anxo et al. (2007); Moss and Wall (2007); European Commission (2006); Moss and O'Brien (2006); Plantenga and Remery (2005); websites www.stakes.fi and www.dw-world.de.

appropriate behaviour for men" (Anxo et al. 2007). The PBP change to eliminate the second two-week waiting period for co-claiming parents was intended to give parents more choice and to encourage the sharing of work and family responsibilities. It also allowed for a "significant reduction in the cost to a father hoping to take just a few weeks of benefits" (Phipps 2006). Indeed, research has shown an increase in benefit-sharing since the most recent PBP revision (HRSDC 2005; Marshall 2003).

In March 2005, Quebec reached an agreement with the federal government to run its own, substantially different, parental leave program. One main variation in the basic Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) is the inclusion of a five-week individual, non-transferable paternity leave paid at 70% of previous earnings. Other major differences in the QPIP, which came into effect in January 2006, include coverage for the self-employed, higher rates of pay for maternity leave and parental leave and no minimum number of hours worked in order to qualify for leave (see *Details of the PBP and the QPIP*).

One in five fathers claims benefits

The proportion of fathers taking time off and receiving paid parental leave benefits has increased sharply, from 3% in 2000 to 20% in 2006 (Chart A). The 2006 rate actually jumps to almost one in four (23%) if ineligible fathers (those without enough paid work hours or the self-employed outside Quebec) are excluded from the calculation.[3] However, whether paid or not, the majority of fathers take some time off when children are born. Recent research found that 55% of fathers were absent from their job around the time of their child's birth, with many using short-duration annual vacation leave (21%) or unpaid leave (11%) (Beaupré and Cloutier 2007).

The change over time in fathers' uptake of parental benefits is noticeably tied to the rules of the program. Perhaps because of the relatively short duration of leave available prior to 2001 (10 weeks), and the rule requiring both qualifying parents to undergo an unpaid two-week waiting period, very few fathers participated—only 3% in 2000. However, after paid benefits were extended to 35 weeks and the two-week waiting period was applied to only one parent, the proportion of fathers filing for parental leave benefits jumped to 10% in 2001. Apart from rule changes, rising take-up rates by fathers may also be influenced by a cultural shift that embraces fatherhood and men's involvement with their children (Daly 2004). In-depth qualitative analyses have shown that views of traditional mothering and fathering roles are changing in Canada (Doucet 2006). Further examples of this shift include the significant increase in fathers' participation in and time spent on primary child care, and the jump in the proportion of fathers as the stay-at-home parent in single-earner families (Marshall 2006). Yet another indicator of fathers' evolving role in caregiving is the increase in the average number of days they miss from work for personal or family responsibilities when preschool children are in the household—for example, up from 1.8 days in 1997 to 6.3 days in 2007 (Statistics Canada 2008). The corresponding numbers for women were 4.1 and 4.8.

Chart A One in five fathers now file for parental leave benefits

* significant difference from the previous year at the 0.05 level
1. Available only to mothers.
Source: Statistics Canada, Employment Insurance Coverage Survey.

The significant rise in the rates of fathers claiming parental leave in 2005 (15%) and 2006 (20%) is mainly attributable to the introduction of the QPIP and the subsequent increase in the participation of Quebec fathers. On the other hand, the take-up rate for mothers has remained steady in recent years at just over 60%.

More Quebec fathers claim—but for shorter periods

Without doubt the QPIP had a profound influence on fathers' use of paid leave in Quebec. Of those eligible for the program, 56% claimed benefits in 2006, up from 32% in 2005 (Table 1). The participation rate

Table 1 Eligible fathers claiming paternity or parental leave and weeks taken

	Total	Quebec	Elsewhere
Couples with eligible fathers		'000	
2004	244	57	188
2005	263	67	196
2006	271	73	198
Fathers' claim rate		%	
2004	12	22*E	9
2005	18(*)	32*	13
2006	23	56*(*)	11
Mother receiving maternity or parental leave			
Yes[1]	25	64*	8E
No	19	F	18E
Average weeks off[2]		weeks	
2005	12	13E	11
2006	11	7*(*)	17*
Mother receiving maternity or parental leave			
Yes	7	6*	13E
No	22	F	22

* significant difference between Quebec and the other provinces at the 0.05 level
(*) significant difference from previous year at the 0.05 level
1. In 2006, mothers in Quebec were more likely to receive maternity or parental benefits (77%) than those living elsewhere (62%).
2. Of those who claimed. Fathers' time off was not asked in 2004.
Source: Statistics Canada, Employment Insurance Coverage Survey, 2004 to 2006.

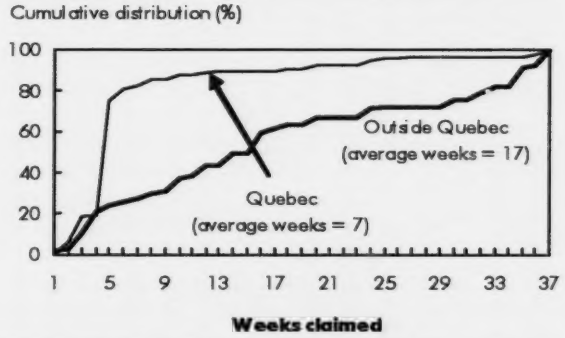
for fathers outside Quebec remained steady over the three years examined, at around one in ten.[4] However, even though the parental leave benefit program was the same across Canada prior to 2006, Quebec had a consistently higher proportion of fathers claiming benefits, perhaps representing some cultural differences.

Furthermore, an above-average proportion of Quebec fathers claimed paid benefits if their partner was also a recipient (64% versus 56%), whereas fathers outside Quebec were less likely to claim if their partner claimed (8% versus the overall average of 11%). Although sample size restricted a detailed analysis, the different patterns are likely linked to the reasons the mothers were not in receipt of benefits. Perhaps as a result of the varying eligibility rules of the PBP and QPIP programs, women in Quebec are more likely to receive benefits than women in other provinces (77% versus 62%). For example, self-employed workers are covered in Quebec and no minimum weeks of work are required for eligibility (see *Details of the PBP and the QPIP*). In non-claiming Quebec couples in 2006, both partners may have been unaware of the new paternity leave. For example, of those who stated "Did not know he could claim benefits" as the main reason for not filing (representing 8% of all couples where the father did not claim), the vast majority (86%) were in couples where the mother did not receive benefits.

For the mothers not in receipt of benefits in the rest of Canada (38%), many would have been employed but not eligible because of too few hours worked or being self-employed, and research shows that women in these situations take less time off from work than those employed and with benefits (Marshall 2003). Therefore, the fathers in these couples may be more inclined to participate in the PBP program so that at least one of the partners uses some of the available benefits. For example, one in five fathers outside Quebec (18%) filed for parental leave benefits when their spouse did not claim, for an average duration of 22 weeks.

In terms of time taken, the average benefit weeks fathers claimed in Quebec was 13 in 2005 and 7 in 2006. Although the survey did not differentiate between paternity and parental leave benefits, it seems that in 2006 most men in Quebec used all the non-transferable paternity benefits (maximum of 5 weeks available), but only a minority opted to use some of the 32 additional weeks available to either parent. Of the eligible fathers in Quebec who claimed, three-quarters received benefits for five weeks or less (Chart B).

Chart B Three-quarters of Quebec fathers claimed benefits for five weeks or less



Source: Statistics Canada, Employment Insurance Coverage Survey, 2006.

Details of the PBP and the QPIP

As of January 1, 2006, the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) replaced the federal Employment Insurance Parental Benefits Program (PBP) for the administration of paid benefits associated with birth or adoption for parents in that province. Below is a summary of the benefits and rules for the two programs in 2006. (More detailed information on the two programs can be found on the respective government websites: www.rqap.gouv.qc.ca and www.hrsdc.gc.ca; also see Phipps 2006.)

Parental benefits program	Parental insurance program (basic plan)[1]
Birth mothers	
• 15 weeks of maternity leave	• 18 weeks of maternity leave
• 55% of average earnings up to a maximum of $39,000 in 2006 ($413 per week)	• 70% of average earnings up to a maximum of $57,000 in 2006 ($767 per week) (adjusted every year)
• two-week waiting period	• no waiting period
• requires 600 hours of paid work in past year	• requires at least $2,000 of earnings in past year
• self-employed excluded	• covers salaried and self-employed
• non-flexible	• some flexibility[1]
Birth fathers	
• not applicable	• 5 weeks of paternity leave
All parents (birth and adoptive)	
• 35 weeks of parental leave	• 32 weeks parental leave for birth parents
• taken by one or shared by both	• 37 weeks parental leave for adoptive parents
• same rules as maternity leave but no second waiting period required	• taken by one or shared by both parents
	• same rules as maternity except for benefit rate: 7 weeks at 70%, rest at 55% for birth parents; 12 weeks at 70%, rest at 55% for adoptive

1. Parents can choose between the basic or the special plan. In all types of benefits—maternity, paternity, parental or adoption—the special plan offers fewer benefit weeks (15, 3, 25 and 28, respectively) at an income-replacement rate of 75%.

Perhaps because paternity and parental benefits are listed as separate programs, men in Quebec are more inclined to participate in only one. The situation outside Quebec is reversed—among fathers who claimed, the average time off actually rose from 11 weeks in 2005 to 17 weeks in 2006, representing almost half of the parental leave time available. This relatively long duration likely arose because more than half of claiming fathers outside Quebec were the sole claimant in the household.

Main income earner also influences fathers' participation

Many factors can influence an eligible father's decision to use available parental leave. An analysis of 30 European programs found five main determinants of take-up rates by fathers—payment level (financial impact), organizational and social culture (expected roles for men and women), program flexibility (when and how leave can be taken), labour market (employer attitude and perceived career advancement), and educational level of parents (Plantenga and Remery 2005). The data in this study allowed an examination of education and income-related factors, and although it could not address the subtler issues of cultural and employer attitudes, the survey did include one question about why the father did not file for benefits. These characteristics of eligible fathers using parental leave were examined in a logistic regression model. Separate models were run for fathers inside and outside Quebec.

Participation in the federal PBP has a potentially greater financial impact on a family than does the basic QPIP because of the earnings replacement rates—55% and 70% respectively. Although some employers offer supplementary top-ups to compensate for reduced earnings, the majority of parents on paid leave do not receive such income. In 2006, 21% of mothers in receipt of parental leave benefits also reported receiving an employer top-up—29% in Quebec and 17% outside Quebec.[5] The more generous non-transferable paternity benefit in Quebec is probably part of the reason the regression results show fathers in that province to be 10 times more likely to claim benefits than fathers living in other provinces (Table 2).

Although the proportion of fathers claiming parental leave benefits is higher when either partner has a college-level education or above, controlling for income factors such as household income before birth,

Table 2 Eligible fathers' participation in paid parental leave (PL)

	Total	Claimed PL[1]	Odds ratio[2]		
			Overall	Quebec	Outside Quebec
	'000	%			
Total	**271**	**23**	...	...	...
Quebec	73	56	10.2*	...	...
Elsewhere (ref)	198	11	1.0	...	...
Father's education					
College diploma or above	147	26	1.2	1.2	1.2
Less than college diploma (ref)	124	19	1.0	1.0	1.0
Mother's education					
College diploma or above	183	27	1.4	1.5	1.2
Less than college diploma (ref)	88	16	1.0	1.0	1.0
Household income month before birth					
Less than $2,500 (ref)	60	23[E]	1.0	1.0	1.0
$2,500 to $4,999	109	23	1.1	0.8	0.9
$5,000 or more	93	23	1.1	1.2	0.7
Mother receiving PL	189	25	...	...	...
Earns less than father (ref)	102	20	1.0	1.0	1.0
Earns the same or more than father	55	37	2.5*	3.5*	2.5
Earning ratio not known	31	F	1.3	2.7	0.8
Mother not receiving PL	83	19	1.5	0.3	3.4*

* statistically significant from the reference group (ref) at the 0.05 level
1. Excludes fathers whose claim status is unknown.
2. This logistic regression calculation indicates whether certain variables significantly increase or decrease the chances (odds) of the father claiming parental leave benefits.
Source: Statistics Canada, Employment Insurance Coverage Survey, 2006.

maternal receipt of maternity/parental benefits and the mother's earnings relative to the father's shows that education does not make a significant difference.

The average household income in the month prior to the birth or adoption also does not appear to make a difference, as households in all income ranges reported roughly the same take-up rates by fathers. This particular income measure may not reflect the true usual monthly income since some mothers may already have been off work in the month prior to the birth. However, another factor supporting the finding is that an equal proportion of all household types reported "money-related matters" as the main reason the father did not claim benefits. Overall, roughly one in five households from each of the different income groups reported finances as the main reason (data not shown).

Another financial consideration is the income a family will lose when one or both parents choose to stay home, with or without paid benefits. Unless individuals receive an employer top-up, or they choose not to take a break from work, the income of most families will decrease after birth.[6]

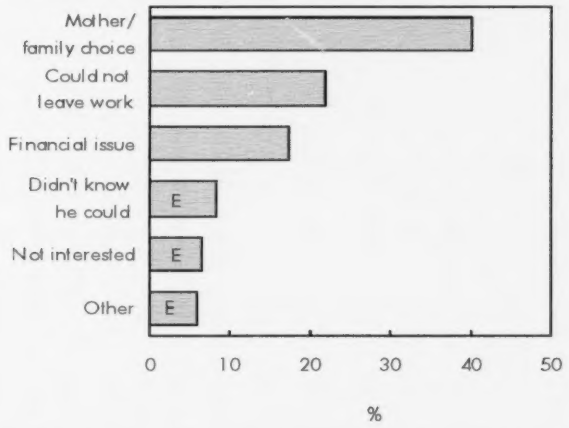
In couples where the mother earned the same as or more than the father and received benefits, 37% of fathers claimed some of the parental leave benefits. After controlling for household income and level of education, fathers in these families were 2.5 times more likely to file for benefits than those in families where the mother received benefits but earned less than the father. This strongly suggests that some families take into account whose salary reduction will be larger before deciding who will file for benefits in order to minimize the loss, but that overall household income level does not make a difference. If the income loss is equal or higher if the mother stays home, couples are more likely to share the benefits. In other words, in terms of a father's participation in the PBP or QPIP program, total family income is not as important as how much the family will lose if the father rather than the mother stays home. This finding is significant at the 0.004 level for all couples, the 0.05 level for couples in Quebec and 0.09 for those outside Quebec.

Finally, regression analysis confirms that fathers outside Quebec are more likely to claim benefits if their partner does not claim benefits. After controlling for other factors, fathers outside Quebec were 3.4 times more likely to claim parental leave if their spouse did not claim leave than fathers with spouses who claimed and earned less.

Social factors also important

When asked why their eligible spouse did not apply for parental benefits, 4 in 10 mothers reported that it was the preferred arrangement of the mother or the family

Chart C Eligible fathers not claiming most commonly did so by choice



Note: The reason was reported by the mother.
Source: Statistics Canada, Employment Insurance Coverage Survey, 2006.

(Chart C). Some common responses in this category included: the mother wanted to take all of the weeks; it was more practical; the mother was nursing; and it was a personal decision. A decision based on individual preference is complex and difficult to predict since it is often influenced by emotions, attitudes and expectations. As shown, a family decision on whether the father claims some of the parental benefits is not based entirely on income and earnings considerations.

However, apart from preference, a sizeable minority of other reasons were given for fathers not claiming. The second most common was that it was impossible to take time off from work (22%). Although not specified, this could reflect logistical problems in taking a break from work, or a perception that the employer would not permit it. Other main reasons included finances (17%), no knowledge of the program (8%) and lack of interest (7%).

Claim patterns vary

Other information in the survey included the timing of the father's parental leave claim in relation to the mother's. Among couples where the father claimed benefits, in roughly half the spouses claimed at the same time, in one-quarter they claimed at different times, and in one-quarter only the father claimed—with co-claiming fathers taking an average of 6 weeks off and sole-claiming fathers, 22 weeks (Table 3). However, this overall pattern masks considerable differences between Quebec and the rest of Canada.

In the majority of couples in Quebec (70%), the father claimed benefits at the same time as the mother for an average of 6 weeks; in the majority of couples outside Quebec (79%), the father was not claiming benefits at the same time as the mother and they claimed for an average of 20 weeks. In fact, 55% of fathers outside Quebec who claimed had a wife who did not claim benefits.

Conclusion

Paid leave programs are intended to help parents balance work and family responsibilities. As well as extending leave, many countries view increased paternal involvement as another means of reaching this goal. To encourage fathers' participation in paid parental leave, some countries have made program rules more flexible, offered bonus weeks as incentive for fathers, or created non-transferable paternal leave periods.

Table 3 Claim patterns for couples where the father claimed parental leave

	Total	Quebec	Elsewhere
Total	**62,200**	**39,800**	**22,400**
		%	
Claimed same time as mother	53	70	F
Did not claim with mother	47	30	79*
Only father claimed	26	F	55
Claimed separately	22	F	F
		Average weeks off[1]	
Overall	**11**	**7**	**17***
Claimed same time as mother	6	6	F
Did not claim with mother	16	11	20*
Only father claimed	22	F	22
Claimed separately	10[E]	F	F

* significant difference from Quebec at the 0.05 level
1. Excludes cases where the length of claim time is unknown.
Source: Statistics Canada, Employment Insurance Coverage Survey, 2006.

In 2001, the federal Parental Benefits Program increased the length of shareable paid parental leave benefits from 10 to 35 weeks and eliminated the second two-week unpaid waiting period for co-sharing parents. Shortly after these changes were made, mothers increased the time they stayed at home and fathers increased their overall participation rate from 3% in 2000 to 10% in 2001 (Marshall 2003).

In 2006, Quebec introduced its own Parental Insurance Plan, which included higher benefit rates, no unpaid waiting period, and a five-week non-transferable leave for fathers. One result of these changes was a jump in the proportion of eligible fathers in Quebec claiming benefits from 32% in 2005 to 56% in 2006, compared with just 11% for fathers outside Quebec.

On the other hand, fathers in Quebec claimed an average of 13 benefit weeks in 2005 and 7 in 2006, whereas fathers outside Quebec increased their time from 11 to 17 weeks. The 2006 finding in Quebec is clearly linked to the large increase in fathers participating in only the five-week paternity program. The reason for the increase in the weeks of leave for fathers outside Quebec is less obvious.

Some families take the potential income loss of the higher-earning spouse into account before deciding who takes the benefits. Fathers across Canada were 2.5 times more likely to claim benefits if they had a co-claiming spouse who earned the same or more than those with a co-claiming spouse who earned less. Finally, fathers outside Quebec were 3.4 times more likely to claim if their spouse did not claim, suggesting that when a family is at risk of not receiving any benefits (which is more often the case outside Quebec), fathers significantly increase their participation rate.

The evolving parental leave programs correspond with ongoing employment and social changes, including the growth in dual-earner couples, increasing expectations that men be involved with the care of children and an increasing awareness of quality of life beyond work issues (Moss and O'Brien 2006). Indeed, research in Canada has shown that spouses are increasingly sharing financial, household and child care responsibilities (Marshall 2006). One in five fathers taking paid parental leave is yet another indicator that dual-earner families are becoming dual-carer as well.

Notes

1. See Phipps 2006 for a more detailed history of Canada's maternity and parental leave programs.
2. In addition to its social objectives, the economic objectives of the PBP are to allow business to retain valuable, experienced employees, and make short-term investment for long-term economic gain (HRSDC 2005).
3. Based on the mother's reporting of spousal ineligibility (see *Data source and definitions*). The remainder of the paper focuses on eligible fathers.
4. In 2006, the overall take-up rate by all fathers, eligible or not, was 48% in Quebec and 10% outside Quebec.
5. Whether a mother received a top-up was tested in the regression models and found to be not significant. Information on employer top-up rates for fathers was not collected.
6. In 2006, among couples where at least one parent claimed benefits after the birth, 72% reported a drop in monthly income averaging $1,300. Only 27% of couples where neither parent claimed benefits reported an income reduction, but for those who did report a drop, the average was $1,700. Most non-claiming families (73%) do not experience an income drop because they either were not in the labour force prior to the birth, or were employed but ineligible for benefits and therefore less likely to take a break from working. However, some families take a break even if they are not entitled to benefits, making the time away from work even more costly.

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